



## 31st District 1997 Session Report

Rep. Eric Robertson

Rep. Les Thomas



Spring 1997

Dear friends,

This was a historic year in Olympia.

After 105 days of hard work, lawmakers enacted two revolutionary reform measures that will change the welfare and juvenile justice systems forever in Washington. And we forged an operating budget that is more than \$100 million below the Initiative 601 spending limit and slows the growth in government by the widest margin in 25 years. It was also the first time since 1957 the Legislature concluded its work on time in a budget-writing year.

Given each of these sizeable accomplishments, we are very proud of the work done during the 1997 legislative session.

We also set out to address other pressing issues, including education, transportation and regulatory reform. The specifics of all of these important issues are outlined in this report.

Finally, we want to thank everyone who contacted us during the session. Hearing your thoughts, ideas and concerns are critical if we are to effectively represent you in the Legislature. If you have any questions, please join us at one of the town hall meetings (details on back) we'll be holding or contact our legislative offices.

Thank you for the honor of serving the people of the 31<sup>st</sup> District.

Sincerely,

*Eric Robertson*

**Eric Robertson**  
State Representative  
Majority Caucus Chair

**Committees:**  
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Transportation Policy & Budget  
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*Les Thomas*

**Les Thomas**  
State Representative

**Committees:**  
Financial Institutions &  
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## Protecting taxpayers, reshaping government, prioritizing education

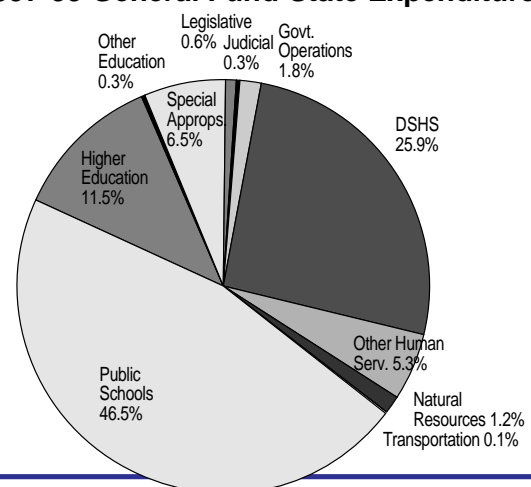
With total spending of \$19.07 billion over the next two years, the state operating budget adopted by the Legislature for the 1997-99 biennium meets our commitment to protect taxpayers by limiting the size and scope of government.

The budget represents an increase of 7.7 percent over the current level — the smallest growth in 26 years — and continues our successful efforts to make government more accountable and responsive to the individuals and families of Washington. And by keeping spending more than \$100 million below the limit established by Initiative 601, we ensure that the budget will be kept under control now and in the future.

Education is the first budget priority. Funding for K-12 education was enhanced \$288 million, including \$59 million in grants for technology and instructional materials — about \$458 per average size classroom. Another \$75 million was spent to fully fund new school construction.

We also increased access to higher education, boosting enrollments by nearly 6,400, continuing support for workforce training programs at the two-year colleges to serve up to 7,200 individuals, and increasing student financial aid to help students from low- and middle-income families.

### 1997-99 General Fund-State Expenditures



### Welfare reform requires personal responsibility

After 60 years, three generations of a welfare system that promoted dependency upon government, the 1997 Legislature adopted a historic new public assistance plan that will empower people to lift themselves out of despair, dependency and poverty and into self-sufficiency and economic independence.

This year's welfare reform plan represents a significant philosophical shift in how best to help those in need. Welfare will no longer be a one-way handout. Now, personal responsibility and accountability will be required of recipients. And, by focusing on the causes of achievement and success, like individual initiative, aspiration and hard work, opportunity will also increase.

Public assistance will be limited to five years in one's lifetime — and, from the time they first apply, all able adults will be required to work or perform community service in exchange for benefits. All teen recipients will be required to live at home or in another state-approved setting and be actively progressing towards a high school degree.



*Rep. Thomas addresses legislators on the House floor regarding property tax relief.*

### Improving public schools

Strengthening education to make sure our children have the basic skills and knowledge they need to be successful was a high priority this year for the Legislature.

As an example, the state operating budget we adopted increases support for education and fully funds new school construction. And more resources are directed into the classroom to improve teaching and help students learn.

In an effort to return to the fundamentals of basic education, we adopted legislation to help schools do a better job of teaching reading in the earliest grades. And we also adopted legislation giving educators the tools and authority to maintain greater discipline in the classroom, as well as free local schools from unnecessary and excessive government regulations that thwart efforts to improve education.

Legislation to create an advanced college tuition payment program was approved to allow parents to purchase tuition units now that would be redeemable for future tuition at any Washington college or university. For more information, contact the Higher Education Coordinating Board at (360) 753-7800.

Finally, sometimes legislators find projects that are fun. A fun project that Rep. Thomas had this year involved about 25,000 wonderful schoolchildren and their campaign to make the dragonfly our new state insect. The kids won him over by proving what a great educational experience it was for them. They learned not only about science, civics, geography, computers and the environment, but about commitment and teamwork. It was a rewarding experience for them, and for him.

### Tax relief that's meaningful and fair

This year, the Legislature approved \$414 million in tax relief — with cuts aimed at property taxpayers, senior citizens and small employers.

First, the Legislature continued the temporary 4.7 percent reduction in the state property tax levy that was enacted in 1995. Then, we approved a comprehensive property tax relief package that significantly reduces the state portion of the property tax, places stricter limits on the growth of property tax levies at all levels of government, and sets an assessment limit to protect homeowners from huge, unexpected increases in the assessed value of their property.

This reasonable and responsible property tax relief and reform package will be before voters this November.

Finally, the Legislature voted overwhelmingly to complete the repeal of the massive business and occupation tax increase imposed in 1993.

### Protecting our communities from juvenile crime

This year, the Legislature succeeded in enacting a juvenile justice reform measure — the most significant changes in 20 years — that will make a real difference both in protecting the public and in reducing the number of teens who become career criminals.

Our reform plan ensures that those hardcore juvenile offenders who commit violent crimes will be safely locked away in a secure correctional facility, where they belong, by broadening the law that tries and sentences them as adults. Now, teens who commit drive-by shootings, first-degree robbery, first-degree child rape, or any crime when armed with a firearm will be prosecuted and sentenced as adults.

It also provides greater flexibility for prosecutors and judges to deal with juvenile offenders so that every youngster who breaks the law receives an appropriate combination of punishment and/or rehabilitation. Alternative sentencing options are encouraged, including boot camps, home detention, mandatory alcohol and drug treatment, and community service.



*Rep. Robertson talks with constituents visiting Olympia during the 31<sup>st</sup> District Day at the Legislature.*

### Transportation budget does not increase gas tax

The Legislature approved a \$3.3 billion transportation budget that did not include an increase in the state's gas tax. However, a performance audit of the Department of Transportation, the State Patrol and the Department of Licensing was funded to closely scrutinize spending and determine if additional efficiencies can be made in those state agencies.

The transportation budget funds the continuation of work that is already in progress, including the most critical safety improvements statewide. But no new projects are included in the spending plan.

New projects in south King County, including construction of HOV lanes on SR 167, road improvements and a traffic signal on SR 410 at 234<sup>th</sup>, railroad crossing grade separations in Auburn, and improvements on SR 164 from Enumclaw to Auburn, have been scrapped until additional funding is identified.

To improve safety and response times for motorist assistance, 66 new troopers will be added to the Washington State Patrol, funded mostly through federal tax dollars.

Finally, about \$100 million of Motor Vehicle Excise Tax money was transferred from the general fund for yet-to-be-determined transportation projects that address freight mobility and economic development.

### Making government more accountable

To make government more accountable to the citizens it's supposed to serve, the Legislature has been working to adopt responsible regulatory reform that eliminates the expensive mass of outdated, unnecessary and ineffective rules and regulations that clog the state bureaucracy.

Two years ago, the Legislature took a significant step toward adopting these objectives, approving strict limits on the authority of agencies to adopt new rules and directing that more assistance be given to the public in their efforts to comply with the law.

This year, the Legislature's major regulatory reform bill, HB 1032, requires agencies to review all new rules within seven years of adoption for effectiveness. Upon review, if a rule is determined to be outdated, duplicative or no longer necessary, it will be eliminated.

Rep. Eric Robertson

Rep. Les Thomas

## Seahawks' stadium set for public vote

The Legislature approved a statewide referendum on a plan to finance construction of a new football stadium for the Seattle Seahawks.

Under the proposal to be considered by voters, the Kingdome would be torn down and replaced by a new football stadium and exhibition center. The total cost of the project is \$425 million. The Seahawks would put up \$100 million (\$50 million by July 1 of this year), guaranteed by team owner Paul Allen. The \$300 million of state funds would be raised through an extension of the current hotel/motel tax in King County from 2012 to 2020 (\$40 million), a sales tax credit and deferral (\$101 million), and new state lottery games (\$127 million). The balance would be raised by King County through a 10 percent tax on admissions and parking at the new facility (\$56 million).

Excess funds — approximately \$30 million — and an additional \$10 million from Paul Allen would be used to develop new play fields across the state.

The public vote on the \$300 million state portion of the \$425 million cost of the new stadium is scheduled for June 17.

## TOWN HALLS!

*Your state representatives Eric Robertson and Les Thomas invite you to attend*

### 31st District Town Hall Meetings



#### Auburn

Tuesday, May 27

7:30 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Auburn City Council Chambers  
25 W. Main St.



#### Buckley

Thursday, May 29

7:30 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Washington National Guard Armory  
455 N. River Road

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Printed on recycled paper

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